

Tuesday, November 12, 2002  
8 pm. Walter Hall

CD 2002--134

Faculty of Music  
Presents

## The Merling Trio

Renata Artman Knific, violin  
Bruce Uchimura, cello  
Susan Wiersma Uchimura, piano  
with  
Scott St. John, viola

**Franz Joseph Haydn**  
1732-1809

Piano Trio in C minor  
Andante  
Allegro spiritoso

**Astor Piazzolla**  
1921-1992

Oblivion  
  
De Las Cuarto Estaciones Portenas  
Verano porteno  
Otono porteno

### INTERMISSION

**Johannes Brahms**  
1833-1897

Piano Quartet No. 3 in C minor, Op. 60  
Allegro non troppo  
Scherzo: Allegro  
Andante  
Finale: Allegro commodo

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This recital is performed on the Edith McConica Steinway piano

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## Programme Notes

### **Haydn: Piano Trio in C minor, Hob. XV:13**

Haydn's C minor trio is one of three composed during 1788-89. He titled these trios as written for clavier "accompanied" by violin and cello, indicating that the strings still played the traditionally subservient role to the keyboard.

Hans Christoph Werbs writes that when Haydn delivered this trio to his publisher on March 29, 1789, he wrote a letter indicating that he had "indulged his publisher's taste" by including a variation movement, which was always very popular and sold well. This movement is the first of the two in the trio. It opens with the folk-like theme in the major key, stated first by the piano. This is followed by an Allegro spiritoso movement in C major, in more-or-less traditional sonata form with the multiple themes that form the basis for the musical content and are repeated in the closing section.

### **Piazzolla: De Las Cuarto Estaciones Portenas**

An Argentinean of Italian descent, Astor Piazzolla was a bandleader and expert player of the bandoneon (a type of accordion) as well as a composer. He was born and died in Buenos Aires, and lived also in New York and Paris. He studied classical music with Albert Ginastera and Nadia Boulanger.

Piazzolla is best known for his "nuevo tango" or "new tango", a style based upon tango and using such musical devices as fugue, chromaticism, dissonance, and elements of jazz. This distinctive style first found acceptance in the U.S. and France, but by the 1980's was popular even in Argentina, where it initially met resistance. Most recently, classical performers,

particularly the Kronos quartet and cellist Yo-Yo Ma, have performed many of Piazzolla's works, of which there are some 750 in all.

*Las Cuarto Estaciones Portenas* ("The Four Porteno Seasons" of "Buenos Aires Seasons") originated in 1965 when Piazzolla wrote "Verano porteno" ("Summer") for a play. Piazzolla completed the work in 1970. As the title implies, his inspiration was Vivaldi's famous "Four Seasons" -- hardly surprising given that all four of Piazzolla's grandparents were Italian immigrants. There are passages that sound much like Vivaldi or are borrowed from him, but overall the style and spirit is that of Piazzolla's nuevo tango.

### **Brahms: Piano Quartet No. 3 in C minor, Op. 60**

Brahms' C minor piano quartet has an unusual and somewhat mysterious history. It was actually the first of three piano quartets he composed, having its beginning in 1855 as a three-movement work in C-sharp minor. Brahms' piano quartets date from the mid 1850's, a time when he became closely involved with the composers and pianists Robert and Clara Schumann. Despondent of Robert's severe mental illness (which led to his death in 1856) and his own intense yet unexpressed infatuation with Clara, Brahms filed the quartet away. In 1874 he took it up again, and as near as can be told from the evidence, transposed the key to C minor, revised or rewrote the outer movements (and perhaps the slow movement) and added the Scherzo.

Less a mystery is the source of the overall sense of tragedy and sadness in the quartet. "You can also put on the title-page a picture of a head with a pistol in front of



it," Brahms wrote to his publisher. "Now you may get an idea of the music!" Clearly this alludes to circumstances with the Schumanns and helps to explain the often fragmentary character of the music. A clear example of this is the first movement, with its many changes of key and texture, lyrical sections contrasting with passionate, almost violent outbursts. The agitated atmosphere continues in the Scherzo except for a quiet interlude which

serves as its trio. The richly expressive Andante is judged to be one of Brahms' finest and most beautiful slow movements. Contrasts return in the finale, where songlike melodies in the strings accompanied by rapid figurations in the piano alternate with chordal sections resembling hymns. The pace picks up, but the sense of sadness remains. — *Greg Fitzgerald, Western Michigan University*

## Biographies

**The Merling Trio** was founded in 1988 and quickly established itself as a premier ensemble. A truly international trio, it brings together musicians from Polish, Japanese and Dutch backgrounds. The Merling Trio has been hailed as a brilliantly distinguished group endowed with remarkable gifts of communication, magnificent precision and an impeccable blend of sound. The trio made its New York debut in Weill Recital Hall at Carnegie Hall in 1993, and was a finalist for the Naumburg Foundation Chamber Music Award in 1994. They have coached with Bonnie Hampton, Ruth Laredo, Martin Canin, Joyce Robbins, Joel Grosnick and Anne Epperson.

The Merling Trio has given numerous recitals throughout Canada and the United States. Members of the trio have performed with orchestras such as the English Chamber orchestra, the Honolulu Symphony, the BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra, the Concerto Soloists of Philadelphia and the South Carolina Philharmonic, under the baton of such notable conductors as Daniel Barenboim, Simon Rattle and Christoph Eschenbach. Recent trio performances include concerts at New York's Merkin Hall and at Gartner Auditorium at the Cleveland Museum of Art, as well as three performances of the

Beethoven Triple Concerto with the Grand Rapids (MI) Symphony.

Several contemporary composers have written works for the Merling Trio, and in 1993, they commissioned and premiered C. Curtis-Smith's *Second Piano Trio*. In February 1998, the trio returned to Carnegie Hall for a sold-out performance of a new work by a New York composer, Terry Winter-Owens, commissioned by the Merling Trio with a Commissioning Grant from the American Composer's forum. During the current season, the trio will commission a new work from jazz great Frank Proto for piano trio with jazz bass. Performances by the Merling Trio have been broadcast widely on television and radio, including WNYC and Peachstate Public Radio. Their first CD, entitled "The Merling Trio performs works of C. Curtis-Smith", was released in 1995 by Albany Records, in collaboration with conductor Dennis Russell Davies. About the CD, *Fanfare* wrote, "The composer could not ask for better interpreters." The trio's latest CD, including works by Haydn, Mozart, Brahms, Schumann and Liszt was released by Pamplin Records in 2001.

In residence at the School of Music at Western Michigan University, members of the trio are also faculty members at the prestigious ENCORE School for Strings,

and at the Lancut Festival in Poland. Festival appearances include the Banff Centre for the Arts, the Pensacola Summer Music Festival, the Skaneateles Festival, the Saugatuck Chamber Music festival, and the Fontana Festival of Art and Music. Recent educational activities include performances and masterclasses for the California Music Teachers Association and the Music Teachers National Association.

The Cleveland *Plain Dealer* said "The players shaped a grand interpretation, fluent in rhythm and rich in romantic feeling." The *Grand Rapids Press* has said, "The trio... delivered a standard of playing that is on par with some of the best known violin-cello-piano teams, captivating the audience through the immediacy and extraordinary sensitivity of its playing."

**Scott St. John** captures the attention of the musical world through riveting performances on violin and viola. A graduate of the Curtis Institute and prizewinner of numerous competitions, he brings superb technique, warmth and musicianship to everything he plays. Recent and forthcoming appearances include NPR "Performance Today" and CBC broadcasts, and concertos with the Calgary Philharmonic, Cincinnati, Grand Rapids, Montreal, Toledo, Utah and Winnipeg Symphonies. He has delighted audiences around the globe, stretching from Japan's Casals Hall to New York's Lincoln Center and Carnegie Hall. Scott is Assistant Professor of Violin and Viola at the University of Toronto Faculty of Music where he also co-ordinates the chamber music programme. "Salon Parisien," on CBC Records, is his newest release.

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Kenneth Peacock was a distinguished alumnus of the University of Toronto's Faculty of Music. His body of work, as a composer and researcher for half a century, has made a significant impact on musical life in Canada. The Faculty of Music was very grateful to learn that Mr. Peacock had made a bequest to the University of Toronto in his will for the benefit of our music programs. With this legacy gift, the Faculty of Music will establish the Kenneth H. Peacock Lecture Series in Music in keeping with his lifelong interest in and contribution to the multi-dimensional study of music. Thank you Mr. Peacock.

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